



3 1761 11969651 6

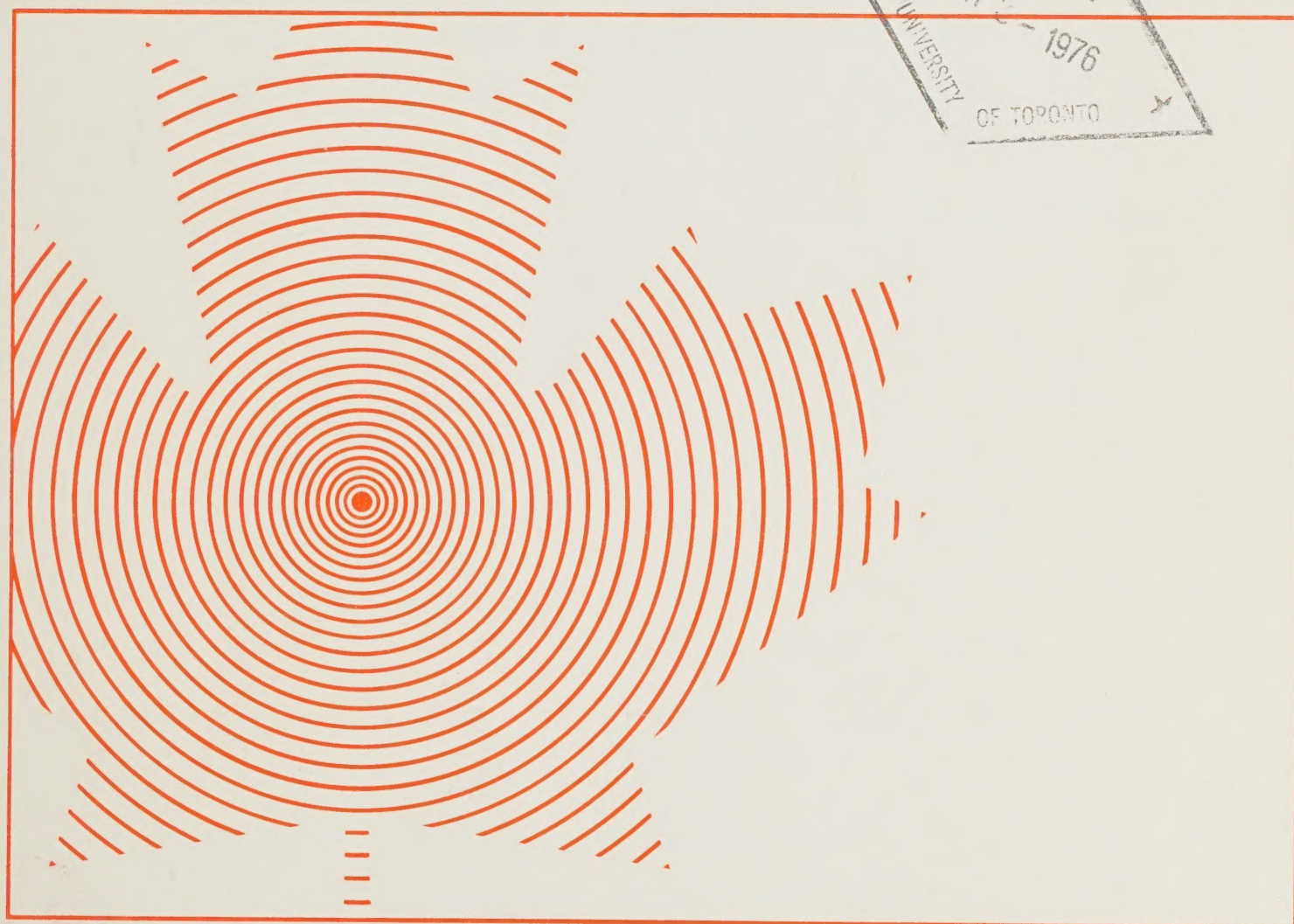
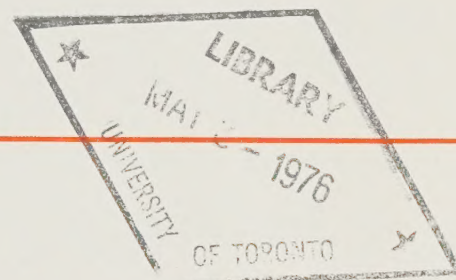
266

Urbanization and Population Redistribution

A Paper by H.L. Laframboise

to the National Social Science Conference

Ottawa, November 21, 1975



^{ry}
Minister of State
Urban Affairs Canada

Ministre d'État
Affaires urbaines Canada

Statements & speeches
≡



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2024 with funding from
University of Toronto

<https://archive.org/details/31761119696516>

CAI
UA
75466

Urbanization and Population Redistribution

A Paper by H.L. Laframboise

to the National Social Science Conference

Ottawa, November 21, 1975

Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentlemen, let me first thank the Social Science Research Council for organizing this Conference, and for offering me this opportunity to speak as a policy adviser on the social sciences as they relate to Urbanization and Population Redistribution.

Whether the Council will thank me, in return, for the views I am about to express, is another matter about which I will no doubt hear later!

But before I get to the substance of my remarks I would like to clarify both the title of this talk and the theme of the Conference.

Dealing first with the title I would have preferred "Urbanization and the Distribution of Population Growth". The word "Redistribution" conveys the idea of moving existing people from where they are to somewhere else. We should contemplate no such program. What I will talk about, rather, is the distribution of future population growth as it affects cities and towns, which is quite a different matter.

Turning now to the theme of the Conference, I would like to note that it is "Social Science and Public Policy in

Canada" and not "Social Science Research and Public Policy". The distinction is an important one because the term "Social Science" permits me to comment on the whole body of social science knowledge and skills, rather than limiting me to the gaps and increments that might be filled or added by further research.

When we speak of social science knowledge we mean our knowledge of the structure of society and the activities of its members. This knowledge is a far vaster store than is contained in the traditional body of formally-organized material. Politicians and policy advisers, and indeed all of us here, are peppered every day with new knowledge about social conditions, attitudes and concerns. This knowledge comes at us literally through all seven of our senses, and we organize and relate it constantly to our past experience. In brief, learning comes to us in many forms and during all our waking hours.

Finally, I sometimes find that tying the word "science" to our knowledge of society is a mixed blessing. It tends to steer us toward the examination of issues that lend themselves to assessment by the scientific method. These may or may not be the most important.

To the extent that policy formulation and social science research tend toward two solitudes, the worrying condition that has given rise to this Conference, much of the blame must be attached to those who insist that knowledge must be scientifically proved, or, even more perversely, who believe that an

issue cannot properly be a subject of serious study unless it lends itself to examination by scientific methods.

In respect of these preliminary comments, it is not necessary, I hope, for me to point out that I am neither against truth, nor for the proliferation of error. What I favour is the larger view of truth that is so necessary to the provision of policy advice and it is from that position that I will address these remarks.

Turning now to Urbanization and the Distribution of Population Growth, there are certain urban phenomena occurring in Canada which have excited the interest of government, universities and the general public. Questions are constantly being asked about the phenomena, their significance and their impact on the future. Trends and projections are being matched up with other questions, such as food production and the conservation of agricultural land, crime and urban violence, energy conservation, housing needs, health care and educational facilities, the deterioration of inner cities and so on.

Among the urban phenomena that have aroused interest is that concerning the rapid urbanization of the Canadian population and its increased tendency toward concentration in a few large centres. The growth rates of some larger urban regions during the 1960's were phenomenal and by the time we had worked over the 1971 Census Data, and projected the trends of the 1960's to the end of the century, we found ourselves with an image of Canada's future population distribution which was disquieting to

say the least. More recent developments in respect of food and food production, and of energy production and consumption, coupled with the evident discomforts and costs of rapid city growth, including the cost of housing, have accentuated our concern and launched a plethora of studies.

Concurrently we have been examining the impact of immigration, including, in the context of my subject to-day, its effect on the future distribution of the population. As we all know by now, immigrants tend to cluster in a few large cities and contribute significantly to their population growth.

In addition to the effects of concentration on cities, we have perceived what might happen to the population growth of individual provinces. If, as we expect, all our population growth will be absorbed by cities and towns, then the relative growth rates of those cities and towns will be a determining factor in the growth rates of the provinces in which they are located. Unbalanced provincial growth will lead to shifts in political power and economic clout. Any serious diminution in a province's share will inevitably diminish its capacity to finance provincial services.

In the face of these concerns about population distribution, you will appreciate that our political masters, at all three levels of government, are seeking policy advice on how to influence the distribution of population, not only among cities and towns in different provinces, but also among cities and towns within provinces.

It is only when we start to assess alternative programs that we become aware of the scale of the barriers that stand in our way.

At the most fundamental level is the social philosophy of Canadians which encompasses freedom of movement, economic determinism, and the right of both individuals and enterprises to make those decisions, within the law, that are in their own best interests. Mounting an assault on the dearly held beliefs and rights of Canadians is just not in the cards.

Secondly, as a consequence of those beliefs, the movement and location of people is very much a result of forces for which we do not normally legislate.

Third, we are far from achieving a consensus on what our preferred future should be. The pro-growth and anti-growth forces are moving more and more toward a state of balance. On the one hand we have those who argue for the control of national inflation and unemployment at whatever the social cost. On the other hand we have those who argue for a better quality of life, at whatever the economic cost.

Fourth, we face a need to better co-ordinate the efforts of three levels of government. The Fathers of Confederation could never have envisaged how intertwined the federal, provincial and municipal interests would become. This is nowhere more true than in the field of urbanization and population distribution.

Fifth and last, we still have a lot to learn about

selective and interventionist programming, particularly how it can be done without making civil servants of the whole work force. We cannot have a game where there are more referees on the ice than there are players.

Since the theme of this conference is "Social Science and Public Policy in Canada" I would now like to turn to the contribution of the social sciences toward the public policy issues of urbanization and population distribution.

Let me note, first of all, that the majority of policy advisers in the federal government have had formal training in one or more of the social sciences. Economists, social statisticians, sociologists, lawyers, historians and political scientists abound. Those policy advisers whose formal training has been in other fields have, through their work, learned a great deal about the structure of our society, and the problems, attitudes and activities of its members.

To survive in the federal government as a policy analyst one must be sensitive to social factors, and have acquired some skill in weighing the ongoing importance of social issues, identifying relevant elements, and obtaining needed information.

Let us start then by paying homage to the contribution of social science training and experience to the skills required for giving policy advice in a political system.

Moving to the next aspect, that of assembling policy information, the picture is a little less clear. Here the need is to obtain and organize information so as to give the pros and cons about an issue that occupies the attention of the government, and to assess alternatives, including that of doing nothing. This work is eclectic and includes talking to others whose judgements are relevant, putting together statistics, descriptive and historical information, and providing "state of the art" information. The products of this process are variously called position papers or discussion papers.

If you will permit me to peel one more layer from the social science "onion" I would like to bring to your attention the importance to policy formulation of theorizing or conceptualizing. This is a creative function by which one, first, brings many pieces together, then, second, arranges them in a relatively simple framework which covers a whole field. Conceptualizing in a social science is a personal and inner-directed search for the fundamental elements of a social area. Some of it is based on hard facts, and some on feelings, but the most important contribution is made by insight and perception.

Theories are disputable, even when brilliant, and are especially disputable when they purport to explain the functioning of our society. These are not disputes that can be resolved by measurement nor by doing sums of various kinds. Nevertheless, without the Galbraiths, Tofflers, Hackers and Fromms, and their counterparts in the Canadian bureaucracy and universities, we

would be condemned to doing mechanical patchwork on the problems we seek to solve.

I have, up to this point, remarked upon the social science skills needed for ongoing policy advice, upon the assembly of policy information, and upon the need for creative talent in constructing theories and concepts. I would now like to say a few words about social science research in its narrowest sense, that is, the search for new knowledge through the application of the scientific method.

By comparison with the other three aspects of social science skills, the direct contribution of social science research to policy formulation in the field of Urban Affairs, in my experience, has been relatively insignificant. I have been careful to limit this judgment to direct contributions, i.e. where a finite piece of social science research has had a traceable effect on a policy recommendation or a government program.

This may seem a strange, even a perverse, statement from the Assistant Secretary of a Ministry that continues to spend some millions of dollars a year on both internal and external research projects but if it is not put forward at this Conference, many will continue to harbour the incorrect idea that a strong link exists between a piece of social science research and the policies that can be developed and implemented in the same subject area.

To illustrate my point, I would like to return to the subject of Urbanization and Population Distribution.

The fundamental discipline involved in this question is demographic research, which is a relatively highly-developed field by comparison with other social science specialties. In a Canadian context, the interest of demographic research lies in illuminating the number, composition and distribution of the Canadian people, not only at a single point in time but also with projections formulated from a number of factors and variously providing possible or likely population futures in respect of age, sex, racial origin, distribution, and so on. Some of the issues raised by demographic research are quite clear, of which one example is the bulge moving through our age classes as a result of the baby boom of the late fifties and early sixties.

If we look at demographic studies on urbanization and population distribution, we might become alarmed at the prospect of concentration and imbalance that present trends appear to offer.

This alarm then leads us to consider what governmental actions might be taken to abate undesirable trends or to encourage desirable ones, i.e. to consider policy.

It is here that demographic research, like other social science research, tends to leave us stranded, with an identified issue but with no clear-cut answers. I do not suggest that answers are not offered up by social scientists but rather that these answers either do not take account of political reality or are so contradictory, one with the other, that they cancel one another out. For example, the variety of approaches suggested

by economists for resolving economic problems suggests a state of disarray that makes a mockery of the word "science" in determining the economic behaviour of a society and in correcting economic ills.

Making policy, in effect, turns out to be pretty rough carpentry, putting together pieces of the materials at hand, getting help where it is offered, dealing with myths and stereotypes, taking account of prejudices, measuring alternative costs, examining jurisdictional issues, weighing the importance of previous policy positions by the government of the day, and getting some sense for the deeply-held feelings of the people of Canada. Although advice from specialists in the social sciences constitutes one of the inputs to the policy process and, at a further step removed, social science research is the basis of their professional training, so many other factors need to be considered that the cause and effect relationship between a specific piece of research and the decision eventually taken is a tenuous one indeed.

Consequently, I would like to suggest that social science research, like research in the hard sciences, be looked upon by its supporting establishments as a long-term investment rather than a quick pay-off deal. I would also suggest that social science researchers take the same modest view.

In this way the body of social science knowledge will be augmented in a systematic fashion and will filter up to the policy process in conjunction with other factors.

This view requires a measure of patience that all social science researchers may not possess. Those who are impatient for a greater application of systematized knowledge, and thereby feel a need to get closer to the action, must then be prepared to shoulder the managerial or political responsibilities that go along with the acquisition of influence, and of the leverage that influence or power permits.

Mr. Moderator, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank you for your attention and leave you with a few words by Rudyard Kipling on the giving of advice by disinterested bystanders to those who are in the thick of the fray:

Kipling wrote:

"The toad beneath the harrow knows,
Exactly where each tooth-point goes;
The butterfly upon the road,
Preaches contentment to the toad."

